

Massachusetts Office For Victim Assistance

MOVA

Victim & Witness Assistance Board

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for Victim Assistance
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**MASSACHUSETTS
VICTIM RIGHTS MONTH
APRIL 2023**

Massachusetts Office For Victim Assistance

Ask **MOVA**

We Can Help.

MOVA is an independent state agency governed by the **Victim and Witness Assistance Board**. MOVA strives to advance victim rights by ensuring all victims and survivors of crime across the Commonwealth are supported and empowered through access to high-quality services that are trauma-informed, culturally-responsive, and reflective of diverse communities. MOVA achieves this through survivor-informed work, advocacy for enhanced victim rights and services, partnerships with agencies and individuals, and a commitment to providing funding and services for underserved and marginalized communities.

MASSACHUSETTS
Victim Rights Month

**2023 Victim Rights Month
Awards Ceremony**

April 24, 2023

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Massachusetts State House, Grand Staircase

Victim Rights Awards Ceremony

April 24, 2023

Welcome and Proclamation

Governor Maura Healey

Liam Lowney, MOVA Executive Director

Opening Remarks

Attorney General Andrea Campbell

Presentation of Victim Rights Month Awards

Members, Victim & Witness Assistance Board

Gerard D. Downing Leadership Award

Stephanie Brown, Casa Myrna

Legislator of the Year Award

Representative Natalie Higgins

Access to Justice Award

LaToya Love, Parent Villages, Inc.

Special Recognition Award

Ronald Odom, Sr. and Kim Odom, SPOT for Life Foundation

Innovation Award

Boston Trauma Response Team

Public Policy Advocacy Award

Michelle Penna, Advocate for 'Amanda's Law'

Advocate of the Year Award

Julie Bakoian, Healing Abuse Working for Change (HAWC)

Chrissy Ruuska, Massachusetts Department of Correction

Closing Remarks

Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll

Liam Lowney, MOVA Executive Director

THE GERARD D. DOWNING LEADERSHIP AWARD recognizes a public or private agency leader who has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing the rights of crime victims. This individual is recognized by their colleagues for their efforts in advancing victim rights.



Stephanie Brown

*Chief Executive Officer,
Casa Myrna*

Passionate about ending domestic and sexual violence and poverty, Stephanie Brown became the Chief Executive Officer of Casa Myrna in July 2013. Casa Myrna is Boston's largest provider of domestic violence awareness, shelter, and comprehensive services to survivors of abuse. Responsible for the strategic direction and health of Casa Myrna, Stephanie is committed to strengthening survivors' and Casa Myrna's voices, partnerships, and participation in the social justice movement.

Prior to her tenure at Casa Myrna, Stephanie was the Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Program and External Relations at the MA Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). Her division was responsible for creating policies and programs related to the Commonwealth's SNAP (food stamps), cash assistance and employment services. Stephanie also served as DTA's Director of Housing and Homeless Services, managing the state shelter systems for homeless families and individuals. As Assistant Commissioner, Stephanie focused on reducing barriers and increasing access to state and federal benefit programs to help low-income families achieve economic stability.

Stephanie also draws on past experiences as: the executive director of Homes for Families, a statewide policy advocacy organization working to end family homelessness; coordinator of domestic and sexual violence policy/programs for the MA Executive Office of Health and Human Services; and as a policy analyst at Jane Doe Inc. Stephanie is also a long-term Board member and volunteer at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center. She lives in Winthrop MA with her significant other, two dogs and two cats.

THE LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD recognizes a legislator who has made outstanding contributions to the victim rights movement through promoting legislation and policy that further rights and services to victims and survivors.



Natalie Higgins is the State Representative for the 4th Worcester District (Leominster). Rep. Higgins is a lifelong Leominster resident, attorney, former rape crisis counselor, and former Executive Director of the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts. A 2006 graduate of Leominster High School, Natalie obtained her Bachelor's degree in Political Science from UMass Amherst, earned her law degree from Northeastern University School of Law and was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 2014.

Rep. Higgins is serving her fourth term in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. She serves as the House Vice Chair on the Joint Committee on Public Service, as well as a member of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery, and the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities. She Co-Chairs the Sexual Violence Working Group of the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators.

Representative Natalie Higgins

Massachusetts House of Representatives

THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE AWARD recognizes a survivor, service provider, agency, or organization (criminal justice and/or community based) whose leadership and outreach efforts have made victim rights and services more accessible or readily available to underserved populations.



LaToya Love

*Victim Advocate,
Parent Villages, Inc.*

LaToya Monroe-Love is the Victim Advocate for Parent Villages in her hometown, Springfield, Massachusetts. She has spent most of her life in Massachusetts, but as a child, her family and her lived in Germany and Texas as her father was in the military. After returning to Springfield, she graduated from Springfield Central High School. She then attended Springfield College and earned her Bachelor of Science. She also has been trained in behavior analysis (ABA) during her more than 15 years of advocating for individuals.

She supports families with nowhere to go, who feel helpless, and have no support or guidance. She has assisted the elderly, disabled, youth, caregivers, and families through the most tragic moments, having built bonds, relationships, and support systems. Recently, she had the honor of receiving the Length of Service and Access to Justice Awards. The recognition is greatly appreciated and compels her to keep pushing for those in need.

She loves being a mother and a wife and attending family gatherings. Her hobbies are watching sports (basketball, baseball), especially her sons, being competitive, dancing, and listening to music. She also enjoys sightseeing when she can.

THE SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD recognizes a survivor of crime who has transformed their experience of victimization into positive change, healing, and leadership through promoting rights and services for victims and survivors.



Ronald Odom, Sr. and Kim Odom
Founders of The SPOT for Life Foundation

Ronald, Sr. and Kim Odom were born and raised in Boston, MA. Both graduated from Dorchester High School classes of '76 and '81. Ronald and Kim married in 1981 and from their union are 5 beautiful children. Ronald is a retired United States Postal Letter Carrier and Kim is an employee of the City of Boston. Ronald and Kim are Pastors of True Vine Church and pursued theological studies through Bethel Bible Institute, Boston Christian Academy and Global Exchange Christian University (Kim). Ronald and Kim are community organizers and founding members of their neighborhood civic association, ROC (Redefining Our Community). The tragic death of their 13-year-old son, Steven, October 4, 2007, to gun violence brought Ronald and Kim to the work of violence prevention and intervention. Ronald and Kim have participated in various violence prevention and intervention efforts both nationally and locally. Ronald and Kim founded The Steven P. Odom Training (SPOT) for Life Foundation in 2018. The SPOT for Life advocates for and supports young people and their families to ensure they are able to recognize, envision and achieve their full potential. Their activism and advocacy are inspired by two of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s quotes, "If we are to go forward, we must go back and rediscover those precious values that all reality hinges on moral foundations and that all reality must have spiritual control." (Ronald); "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." (Kim)

THE INNOVATION AWARD recognizes an individual survivor, service provider, agency, or organization (criminal justice and/or community-based) who has developed an innovative program or policy that helps crime victims.



The Boston Trauma Response Team (BTR) is committed to offering culturally responsive and holistic mobile crisis response to individuals affected by violence in their community. The team is made up of skilled professionals and volunteers who are available 24/7 and 365 days a year. BTR is often called upon by community members, community leaders, or emergency personnel to support those affected by violence.

BTR's model is designed to help individuals build and sustain resiliency from exposure to traumatic events. This ensures that those impacted by community violence have the necessary support and tools to adapt to the trauma's reaction and heal. BTR offers emotional support, helps with basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing, and transportation, and serves as a liaison between victims, emergency services, and other social support systems- critical services needed in the aftermath of community violence. They also assist in arranging follow-up services and providing referrals to appropriate agencies for ongoing assistance. BTR works hand-in-hand with community organizations to ensure that impacted community members receive the necessary support to recover and become more resilient.

To provide immediate assistance to victims of community violence, BTR employs the evidence-informed Psychological First Aid (PFA) model. This involves connecting individuals with social supports, educating them about the impact of trauma, and developing immediate coping plans that promote both immediate and long-term adaptive functioning.

BTR operates a 24-hour support line where individuals impacted by community violence can access confidential support in the moment or be connected to a network of providers specialized in trauma response. All services are free and confidential, making BTR an essential resource for those needing support.

THE PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY AWARD recognizes a survivor of crime who has transformed who has transformed their experience of victimization into impactful change through promoting legislation or advocating for policy changes that further the rights and services to fellow victims and survivors.



Michelle Penna

Advocate for 'Amanda's Law'

Michelle Penna has spent most of her life living in Chicopee. She will have been married to her husband Mike for one year on May 14th. She has two children, AimeeLee (34), who has a 15-year-old son and is getting married in August, and Nicholas (30), who joined the Marine Corps out of high school and left as a lance corporal after four years and is currently a machinist for Smith & Wesson. Michelle has worked for Ford for 13 years as a warranty administrator, and this year she will be headed to Dearborn, MI as one of seven administrators from the country to work on policy and procedures. During the pandemic, she had the amazing opportunity to become a foster mom to her 10-year-old niece for 18 months. Her niece is now happily reunited with her mom and will soon be turning 13.

Michelle's 20-year-old daughter Amanda was murdered on August 26, 2011. The night she was murdered, two officers took images of her on their personal cell phones and shared them via text and e-mail to several individuals both inside and outside of the department. From June of 2013 until August of 2022, she continued to fight for a change in the laws. Amanda's Law has now been passed.

THE ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD recognizes an individual from a public and/or community-based agency who has made extraordinary contributions to the lives of victims and survivors. There are two recipients this year.



Chrissy Ruuska

*Director of Victim Services,
Massachusetts Department of Correction*

With over 20 years of experience working in Victim/Survivor Services, Chrissy Ruuska has worked with both victims/survivors and perpetrators of violent crime. In her current position, Chrissy oversees the Victim Services Unit (VSU), responsible for providing notification, support, and services to all victims of crime. Chrissy is a passionate advocate for victim-centered Restorative Justice and has been instrumental in multiple such initiatives: including reinstating the DOC Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD), expanding the program's capacity by securing funding, and arranging training for ten local facilitators. She has developed and implemented a victim-centered Apology Letter Bank, the first of its kind in Massachusetts. Chrissy has worked to increase engagement and support with community stakeholders, collaborative state agencies, and with DOC staff who become victims of violent crime while on the job. She currently serves on the Commissioner's Diversity Advisory Committee, the DOC Restorative Justice Advisory Committee, and the board of the National Association of Victim Assistance in Correction (NAVAC).

Prior to joining the DOC, Chrissy worked for MA Probation Service for 20 years, while simultaneously working for New Hope, Inc. During her career, she has facilitated visitation between children and their non-custodial parents, facilitated and provided clinical supervision for Intimate Partner Abuse Education Program (IPAEP) groups, and worked as a SAIN advocate at multiple hospitals, providing advocacy and support for victims/survivors in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault.

Chrissy holds a bachelor's degree in Human Services and Substance Abuse Counseling from Southern New Hampshire University and a Master of Business Administration from Fitchburg State University. She holds multiple professional certifications and trainings including MA Department of Public Health certification as an Intimate Partner Abuse Education Program Facilitator; Victim Offender Dialogue facilitation certificate, by Just Alternatives; Criminal/Legal Restorative Justice Practices, by Suffolk University Center for Restorative Justice; and Advanced Restorative Justice Practitioner certificate, by National Justice Training & Fox Technical College.

THE ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD recognizes an individual from a public and/or community-based agency who has made extraordinary contributions to the lives of victims and survivors. There are two recipients this year.



Julie Bakoian

*Manager of Legal Services,
Healing Abuse Working for Change (HAWC)*

Julie Bakoian began advocating for survivors in 2009, as a hotline and legal advocate at HAWC (Healing Abuse Working for Change). In 2016, she joined HAWC full time as the Senior SAFEPLAN Advocate, rolling out the expansion of the SAFEPLAN Program in 3 courts in Essex County. In her current role as Manager of Legal Services at HAWC, she oversees HAWC's SAFEPLAN and VOCA Legal Advocacy programs in 5 local courts, coordinate's HAWC's free legal clinics, and represents survivors on three High Risk Teams. At the core of Julie's work is a commitment to enhance survivor's access to justice through individual and systems advocacy.

Julie is a member of The Governor's Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, High Risk subcommittee, a member of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Council for legal professionals, JDI/MLRI Court Listening Session Planning Group, and the Statewide Domestic Violence Legislative Advocacy Group. Julie obtained her Gender, Leadership and Public Policy Graduate Certificate from UMass Boston, and her B.A. in History from UMass Amherst.

The Massachusetts Victim Bill of Rights

M.G.L. Ch. 258B

The Massachusetts Victim Bill of Rights (M.G.L. c258B) provides the below rights and services to victims and survivors of crime in order to ensure a meaningful role for them in the criminal justice system. While the Bill of Rights applies to all crimes, victims and survivors of violent crimes are given priority status for services.

Victim assistance programs are available in each District Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General, and several post-conviction agencies. After the crime has occurred the needs of victims and their families often change. The Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA) is committed to working with community providers to find the services that meet a victim's evolving needs.

Below are some of the rights to which victims and witnesses are entitled. For a complete listing of rights, please refer to the Victim Bill of Rights (M.G.L. c258B).

- **The right to be informed about victim rights and services in the criminal justice system.**
- **The right to receive specific information about the criminal case.**
- **The right to be heard and present at court proceedings.**
- **The right to confer with key officials at major stages in the court process.**
- **The right to financial assistance.**
- **The right to be notified of an offender's release or status while in custody.**
- **The right to other protections in the criminal justice system.**